

SOCIOECONOMIC CHALLENGES AMIDST A GLOBAL TRIPLE THREAT OF CONFLICTS, COVID-19, AND CLIMATE CHANGE:

WESTERN COUNTRIES AND NATIONS
UNDER INTERNATIONAL SANCTIONS

PART 3

Editors:

Abdul Kader Mohiuddin
Úrsula Oswald-Spring
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**Socioeconomic Challenges
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of Conflicts, COVID-19, and
Climate Change:**

***Western Countries and Nations
Under International Sanctions
(Part 3)***

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FOREWORD

From the early 2000s, Western sanctions on Iran intensified after revelations of its nuclear program, culminating in sweeping UN and U.S. measures targeting oil exports, banking, and technology, including its 2012 disconnection from SWIFT; partial relief followed the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, but the U.S. withdrawal in 2018 restored and expanded restrictions, deepening Iran's economic isolation and inflationary pressures. In parallel, sanctions on Russia escalated after 2014 (Crimea) and expanded dramatically following the 2022 Ukraine invasion, with over 5,000 measures by 2026, including SWIFT exclusions, asset freezes, export controls, and oil price caps. These sanctions constrained revenues, disrupted financial systems, weakened currencies, and limited access to advanced technologies, slowing industrial and military capacity in both countries. However, they did not fully halt geopolitical ambitions or conflicts, instead prompting adaptation through import substitution, informal trade networks, and "shadow" energy exports. Both Iran and Russia pivoted toward non-Western partners—especially China and India—expanding energy trade, local-currency settlements, and alternative financial channels that reduced reliance on Western systems. Western sanctions also backfired by triggering energy shortages and sharp fuel price increases in Europe, which fueled inflation and slowed economic growth across advanced economies. They further backfired by accelerating the formation of alternative trade and financial networks outside Western control, gradually weakening the dominance of the dollar and reducing long-term Western economic leverage. At the same time, sanctions contributed to global energy price volatility, supply chain disruptions, and market fragmentation. As a result, while sanctions imposed significant economic costs on Iran and Russia, they also reshaped global trade patterns, redistributed geopolitical alignments, and, in some respects, diluted the long-term influence of Western economic power.

The UK economy has been shaped by successive shocks beginning with Brexit in January 2020 after 47 years in the EU, followed by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which caused the deepest recession in over 300 years and led to hundreds of billions of pounds in government borrowing. During 2020–2021, GDP contracted sharply, trade saw its steepest decline, unemployment initially fell then rose, and regions like Wales and Northern Ireland along with sectors such as accommodation and construction were heavily impacted. In February 2022, the Ukraine war intensified energy shocks, pushing UK inflation to 11.1% in 2022 (a 41-year high), while global gas prices rose over 350% by August 2022 and UK wholesale gas increased about 40%, deepening the cost-of-living crisis. In the same period, farm fuel costs rose around 30%, consumer confidence fell to its lowest since November 2020, and real incomes declined significantly through 2022–2023. Between 2022 and 2024, political instability emerged with three different prime ministers amid ongoing volatility from Brexit, pandemic recovery, and energy pressures. From 2023 onward, the Red Sea crisis increased shipping costs by up to 300% and caused delays of up to four weeks, while the risk of a Strait of Hormuz disruption remains a major inflationary and energy shock threat, even as the UK largely avoids direct conflict involvement and focuses on diplomatic responses. The analysis on UK examines how overlapping crises in a former global power have converged amid wider global disruptions, including difficulties meeting the "Net Zero" target by 2050 and rising environmental degradation such as a worsening sewage crisis driven by pandemic effects and extreme weather. It further discusses food insecurity, chronic healthcare underfunding, repeated strikes, widening inequality, Long COVID impacts, and energy contradictions, collectively weakening the UK's global legacy of imperial influence, parliamentary democracy, and common law traditions.

The United States, the world's 4th-largest country by area and a leading economic and technological power, has engaged in near-continuous military activity since the end of World War II, shifting from large-scale wars to proxy conflicts, counterterrorism operations, and limited interventions often without formal declarations of war. Its involvement in the Middle East spans over a century, evolving from early 19th-century maritime activity to major events such as the 1953 Iranian coup, the 1991 Gulf War, and 21st-century wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, along with interventions in Libya and Yemen. As of April 2026, U.S. national debt has surpassed \$39 trillion, approximately 1.37 times its GDP. In early 2026, the U.S. intensified actions against Venezuela and Cuba. At the same time, U.S. involvement in the Iran conflict (Operation Epic Fury) is closely linked to strategic competition with China, affecting the BRI project and global energy security. Meanwhile, hundreds of anti-war protests signal rising public dissent, as ongoing military engagement raises concerns about human rights and the credibility of its image as the world's second-largest democracy. Domestically, a 43-day government shutdown ending in November 2025 exposed deep political divisions between Republicans and Democrats over federal funding. The country also faces a significant climate crisis driven by prolonged reliance on fossil fuels, despite being a leading exporter of oil and gas while criticizing China's energy policies. The chapter on the United States outlines how the COVID-19 pandemic affected more than half the population, exposing broken safety nets that fueled firearm homicides, recession, currency depreciation, and unemployment fraud. It shows how the Ukraine war benefited the U.S. through energy exports to Europe, strengthening NATO and its strategic position, while it also shaped protests over aggression against Palestinians even as it increased military aid to Israel. The chapter argues the U.S. accounts for more than half of global climate-related economic losses yet bypasses climate funding, revealing contradictions, and highlights ongoing sectoral crises including unemployment and homelessness, substance and firearm abuse, excessive borrowing, inflationary pressures, and continued involvement in global conflicts.

Europe comprised 44 countries, including 27 EU member states and 21 Eurozone economies, with more than half classified as developed, and it historically experienced prolonged intra-European wars and over 500 years of colonial expansion from the early modern period to the mid-20th century, during which European powers dominated large parts of Asia and Africa. The European Union became the world's third-largest economy, accounting for about one-sixth of global trade, down from over 50% in the 1960s–1970s, supported by strong geography but exposed to external vulnerabilities, including up to 40% of Asia-bound trade passing through the Red Sea corridor. The combined shocks of COVID-19 and the 2022 Ukraine war triggered an unprecedented energy crisis, sharply rising fuel prices and inflation while increasing poverty risks, even as labor markets remained relatively resilient with stable unemployment levels. By early 2026, Europe's economic outlook remained sluggish, with Eurozone GDP growth projected at roughly 1%–1.3%, reflecting structural weaknesses in major economies and persistent geopolitical pressures. EU states supported the U.S. in Ukraine, viewing Russia's invasion as an existential security threat amplified by sanctions, energy disruption, inflation, and supply chain stress, while also facing spillover effects from US–China tensions. However, the UK, France, and Germany refused to join a U.S. naval blockade of Iran in the Strait of Hormuz, citing legal concerns, escalation risks, and fears of a wider regional war threatening global oil supplies and economic stability. The chapter on Europe explains how the COVID-19 pandemic exposed major healthcare limitations, including critical drug shortages, and shows Europe as the second-most affected region after South America in deaths per million. It also examines how the Ukraine conflict sharply worsened conditions, with electricity and gas prices rising roughly fifteenfold since early 2021 and Europe's dependence on fossil fuels—especially coal—temporarily increasing. Despite climate policies advancing since the 1990s and a strong push toward renewable

energy by 2023, the continent still faced a 97% rise in heat exposure over the past decade. The chapter also highlights sector-specific disruptions driven by overlapping global crises, along with growing food insecurity across parts of Europe.

Iran has a continuous civilizational history spanning 6,000–8,000 years and a military legacy of over 2,500 years, beginning as one of the world's earliest superpowers on the Iranian plateau. From the 16th–19th centuries, Persia and the Ottoman Empire remained long-term rivals, repeatedly clashing over the Caucasus and Mesopotamia, before Iran shifted from imperial expansion to repeated foreign invasions and modern proxy warfare. In the early 1950s, Iran nationalized its oil industry, triggering the joint Operation Ajax coup that removed Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh and restored Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi with strong U.S. backing, setting the stage for the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Iran holds the world's third-largest proven oil reserves—about 208–209 billion barrels, roughly 12% of global reserves and nearly a quarter of those in the Middle East—giving it substantial geopolitical leverage. In the post-revolution era, Iran consolidated power under the IRGC and expanded its regional influence through allied non-state armed groups across the Middle East. To counter Western pressure, Iran strengthened ties with Russia and China—through arms, technology, and yuan-based trade bypassing SWIFT—while deepening its partnership with India via Chabahar Port to secure energy flows, expand regional access, and enhance economic resilience. As of 2026, Iran was described as a regional hegemon engaged in proxy networks and maritime pressure strategies affecting the Strait of Hormuz. The crisis was linked to wider disruptions extending into the Red Sea, severely impacting global energy flows. The chapter on Iran highlights how the country's heavy reliance on oil—especially since global oil prices surged in the mid-1970s—has constrained industrial diversification, while worsening climate and water crises are projected to reduce economic output by up to one-third by the end of the century. These structural pressures, compounded by the consecutive impacts of COVID-19, sanctions, and the Ukraine war, pushed the country into deep economic turmoil and fueled nationwide protests. It further examines sectoral impacts alongside overlapping challenges, including widespread food insecurity, violations of women's and children's rights, a growing refugee crisis, recurring protests, and persistent imperial ambitions.

Russia, the largest country on Earth, was, before the onset of the Ukraine war, a major contributor of fossil fuel energy, a critical global supplier of agricultural commodities like wheat and mineral fertilizers, ranked 10th in terms of nominal GDP, among the top exporters, and also a major importer globally. Russia's role in present-day conflicts reflects a strategic drive to restore regional influence and secure trade and security leverage through the war in Ukraine, aimed in part at consolidating the Donbas region, linking it to Crimea, and controlling the Sea of Azov and the northern Black Sea, to project power into the Mediterranean and the Middle East—thereby strengthening military depth, protecting southern borders, and shaping key energy and agricultural trade routes. Although it holds a tactical advantage in eastern Ukraine through gradual advances and superior numbers, does so at an unprecedented cost of over 1.2 million casualties, recently worsened by Ukrainian fire and drone operations. Meanwhile, disruptions such as the Druzhba pipeline damage and the 2022 Nord Stream 1 sabotage show that Europe's energy challenges are structural and not easily solved by restoring ties with Russia. Sanctions have also reshaped global energy markets, benefiting the U.S., Norway, and Algeria through higher exports, while Turkey, India, and China profit from refining and re-exporting discounted Russian oil and gas into global and partial European markets. This occurs amid rising Western strain, with growing U.S.–NATO tensions and Europe's energy vulnerability deepening under sanctions and wider disruptions in global energy flows, including risks linked to the Strait of Hormuz, while U.S. actions in Venezuela, Iran, and Cuba are seen as part of a broader effort to reshape influence

in the Western Hemisphere and the Middle East. The chapter on Russia shows that COVID-19 placed significant strain on Russia's healthcare system and economy, disrupting supply chains, employment, and key industries while exposing structural weaknesses. Aggression in Ukraine intensified economic isolation through sanctions, reshaped trade and financial systems, and reinforced dependence on alternative geopolitical and energy partnerships. At the same time, climate change has escalated environmental risks—such as extreme weather and permafrost thaw—undermining infrastructure, agriculture, and long-term economic stability while complicating policy priorities.

Therefore, prolonged conflicts involving Western powers—most notably the Ukraine war and Middle East tensions—have triggered global energy shocks, record inflation, supply chain disruptions, and rising military costs, driving political instability, debt crises, and widening inequality across the UK, US, and Europe. Sanctions and counter-measures have reshaped energy and trade routes, benefitted some non-Western nations while deepened economic isolation and structural weaknesses in Russia and Iran. Climate change—through extreme weather, thawing permafrost, water shortages, and rising heat—is weakening infrastructure, agriculture, and economic stability while slowing progress on net-zero goals, and lingering COVID-19 aftereffects are still straining healthcare, safety nets, and labor markets, fueling food insecurity, housing crises, public unrest, and refugee flows toward a future of ongoing volatility and socioeconomic strain.

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PREFACE

This book emerges at a moment when the global order is being reshaped by overlapping crises that no nation can fully escape. Over the past two decades, Western sanctions on countries such as Iran and Russia have intensified geopolitical divisions, disrupting financial systems, energy flows, and global trade while accelerating the rise of alternative economic alliances beyond Western control. At the same time, the economic centers of the United Kingdom, United States, and wider Europe are confronting their own internal strains, shaped by the lingering effects of the pandemic, energy shocks linked to the Ukraine war, and mounting inflationary pressures. Brexit, political instability, and a deepening cost-of-living crisis have tested the resilience of British institutions, while across Europe sluggish growth, energy insecurity, and rising poverty risks signal structural vulnerabilities beneath its developed status. In the United States, escalating national debt, persistent political polarization, and continuous global military engagements reflect a superpower under mounting fiscal and social pressure. Meanwhile, sanctions have not only constrained Iran and Russia but also driven them to adapt, forging new partnerships, parallel financial systems, and alternative energy markets that challenge long-standing Western dominance. These shifts have contributed to global market fragmentation, volatile energy prices, and supply chain disruptions that reverberate across all economies. Compounding these pressures, climate change is intensifying extreme weather, undermining infrastructure, agriculture, and long-term development prospects, while slowing progress toward sustainability goals. The aftershocks of COVID-19 continue to strain healthcare systems, labor markets, and social safety nets, exposing deep inequalities within and between nations. Across both sanctioned and sanctioning countries, rising food insecurity, housing crises, and public discontent reveal the human cost of these converging disruptions. What emerges is a world no longer defined by stable economic hierarchies, but by uncertainty, adaptation, and shifting power balances. This volume seeks to explore these intertwined crises, offering a critical examination of how conflict, policy, and environmental change are collectively reshaping the socio-economic future of nations in an increasingly fragmented global landscape.

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Section 1 (Western Countries)

CHAPTER 1

UK: A Former Global Ruler is Flawed by Itself**Abdul Kader Mohiuddin^{1,*}**¹ *Alumnus, Faculty of Pharmacy, Dhaka University, Dhaka, Bangladesh*

Abstract: The UK faces a number of interconnected problems that have a significant impact on health, the economy, and societal harmony despite having conquered a quarter of the planet and amassed wealth from the vast territories it occupied. These challenges encompass the convergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and international conflicts, notably the war in Ukraine. The COVID-19 pandemic, emerging in late 2019, has overstretched healthcare resources, exacerbated mental health issues, and upended the economy. The pandemic also introduced socio-economic disturbances, including a severe GDP contraction, rising unemployment, and an uneven economic impact across sectors like accommodation and food services. On the climate front, the UK grapples with direct health consequences such as heatwaves and air pollution, which respectively led to increased mortality and exacerbated respiratory diseases. Economically, disruptions in agriculture, damages to infrastructure, and impacts on sectors like insurance and energy signify the broad spectrum of climate-related challenges. Simultaneously, global conflicts, exemplified by the Ukraine crisis, ripple into the UK, causing psychological stress, potential health issues among refugees, and economic ramifications from disrupted trade to increased defence expenditure. These challenges have an intricate interplay; for instance, economic strains from the pandemic might hinder efforts against climate change or conflict mitigation. Therefore, a comprehensive, coordinated strategy is essential. Key policy suggestions involve bolstering public health infrastructure, revitalising the economy, intensifying climate action, and promoting international collaboration. By navigating these intertwined issues, the UK can forge a path towards resilience, health, and sustainability.

Keywords: Climate action, Convergence of crises, Defence spending, Economic fallout, Extreme weather events, Greenhouse gas emissions, Health infrastructure, Humanitarian aid, International collaboration, Trade disruptions, Unemployment.

INTRODUCTION

The British Empire was one of the biggest and most influential empires in history. It once ruled over about a quarter of the world's population and occupied about a

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quarter of the planet's land area (Britannica, 2023; Swain, 2008). From the 16th to the 20th centuries, the British Empire expanded its influence across various continents, including North America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania. The empire's control over vast territories and resources did lead to the accumulation of wealth for Britain. During the period 1765–1938, Britain's exploitative policies were responsible for approximately 100 million excess deaths in India, more than all famines in the Soviet Union, Maoist China, and North Korea combined, draining a total of nearly \$45 trillion from India alone, nearly half of the current global GDP (Norton, 2022). After 1450, the British Empire expanded across several continents. Now, it has almost shrunk back to where it began. Britain still had a real empire when the late Queen Elizabeth was crowned in 1952, with more than 70 overseas territories. Although it took over 400 years to build the British Empire to its peak, it only took a few decades for it to unwind, owing primarily to World War II. Although the UK emerged as one of the war's victorious powers, the conflict had left it economically devastated (Fig. 1). The rise of the Industrial Revolution and economic development in other parts of the world alleviated the British Empire's relative economic importance. Other countries, such as the United States and Germany, were emerging as formidable economic competitors.



Fig. (1). General map of the United Kingdom (generated by Mapchart).

Britain's economic history includes periods of significant wealth accumulation as a result of colonial exploitation and trade, as well as subsequent challenges such as economic downturns and recessions. The appointment of two different prime ministers since July 2022, as well as a flurry of resignations and dismissals of senior government ministers, has been a turbulent few months for UK politics. Since the onset of Brexit in 2016, followed by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and the Ukraine-Russia war in 2022, the UK has experienced a compounded economic impact. Brexit initially disrupted trade and consumer confidence, while COVID-19 exacerbated supply chain disruptions and unemployment, leading to an 11.0% GDP drop in 2020. The Ukraine-Russia war further escalated inflation and energy costs, pushing the UK's cost of living higher, with a notable 10.5% inflation rate in February 2023 (Meadows *et al.*, 2024).

Prior to the 2008 global financial crisis, the UK was a strong performer in the G7. However, this momentum faded in the middle of the last decade. The sovereign debt crisis that affected several Eurozone countries, particularly in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, had implications for the UK's trade and financial relationships with the Eurozone. Also, Brexit introduced a new layer of uncertainty into the economic landscape. The negotiations and eventual exit had implications for trade, investment, and economic planning. Furthermore, the UK economy is in disarray, with the Bank of England raising interest rates for the first time in 33 years, inflation reaching a 41-year high (11%), and a recession reaching a 100-year high (Elliott & Inman, 2022; Jordan & Thomas, 2022; Romei & Strauss, 2023).

Real business investment was still slightly lower in 2022 than in 2016, despite a 14% increase in other G7 economies, which reflects the complex interplay of factors like Brexit, the COVID-19 outbreak, the war in Ukraine, and their impact on the UK's economic trajectory (IMF European Department, 2023). Although the UK is expected to avoid a recession in 2023, the country faces a difficult economic outlook, according to the IMF. The energy price shock caused by Russia's war in Ukraine has hampered the recovery, with growth forecast at 0.4% in 2023 and 1% in 2024. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has profoundly affected the UK's financial system, impacting inflation, employment, and stability. Despite UK banks' strong post-pandemic position with ample liquid assets and robust capital, indirect exposures through global banking relationships pose risks. Non-bank financial sectors like investment funds and insurance companies have shifted away from riskier assets, facing liquidity concerns. Investor sentiment has shifted towards safer assets amid heightened market volatility. The invasion underscores the importance of financial stability, prompting a cautious monetary policy response from the Bank of England, which raised rates aggressively to counter inflation driven by soaring energy prices (Bank of England, 2022). Savings

CHAPTER 2

Unites States: With Great Power Comes Greater Challenges**Abdul Kader Mohiuddin^{1,*}**¹ *Alumnus, Faculty of Pharmacy, Dhaka University, Dhaka, Bangladesh*

Abstract: The United States, often regarded as a global superpower, faces numerous socioeconomic challenges, including income inequality, poverty, access to essential services, education disparities, and climate-related crises. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated economic stagnation, substance use disorders, and the debt crisis, emphasizing the need for robust public health infrastructure and raising global environmental responsibility questions due to the US's ecological footprint. The energy sector faces high costs, supply chain disruptions, and the transition to renewable sources. The mining and metals industry faces shifts in global supply chains, particularly with the Ukraine crisis impacting imports. Strategic metals like cobalt and nickel are experiencing price surges, underscoring their critical role in various industries. Energy insecurity is a significant issue, with disparities in access and implications for vulnerable communities. The automotive industry faces heightened competition from Chinese electric vehicle manufacturers, necessitating adaptation and innovation. The healthcare system faces access, quality, and cost issues, with significant economic burdens associated with health disparities. Housing market dynamics and climate-related vulnerabilities impact property values. Nevertheless, the Ukraine crisis made it among the winners of arms dealing in Europe. And the major shifts in global power balance exerted the greatest fear: the use of nuclear weapons, where the superpower has lots of opportunity to relieve tension by using its diplomatic power. The United States, responsible for over one-third of global economic losses from weather, climate, and water hazards, refused to compensate developing countries at COP27 due to geopolitical tensions and economic pressure.

Keywords: Discrimination, Economic burden, Energy insecurity, Government debt, Health coverage, Heatwave, Inflation, Monetary control, Racism, Vaccine hesitancy.

INTRODUCTION

The United States is widely regarded as the most powerful country on the planet, with a highly developed economy, one of the strongest currencies, the highest

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median household income, but the world's highest income inequalities among developed countries, and the world's second-largest democracy (Fig. 1). It's a huge importer of minerals and fuels, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, precious metals, and organic chemicals. Also, it exports refined petroleum, petroleum gas, crude petroleum, automobiles, and integrated circuits to Canada, Mexico, China, Japan, and South Korea.



Fig. (1). United States of America (Generated by MapChart).

With more than 8,000 metric tons of reserves, the USA has the largest gold stockpile in the world. It represents 17% of global manufacturing output and is one of the highest polluters, one of the largest producers of petroleum and natural gas, but still imports them, and has the fastest-growing economy, but government debt accounted for 120% of the country's Nominal GDP in March 2023. However, in the first quarter of 2024, the US Federal Reserve System (FRS) valued all assets in the American financial market at \$160 trillion (Burns & Adler, 2024). As of 2022, approximately 70% of American companies' monetary resources are obtained through the issuance of corporate bonds and their placement in US and global financial markets, whereas bank loans provide only 20% of enterprises' monetary needs, financing the acquisition of working capital. At the beginning of 2022, traditional investment institutions accounted for more than 50% of US

financial-market assets. It is reasonable to assume that such a market share ratio between banks and investment firms is near optimal and will remain so in the near future (Davydov, 2022).

By July 2023, COVID-19 had killed more than 1.1 million people and had affected almost one-third of the U.S. population. U.S. intelligence agencies found no direct evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic stemmed from an incident at China's Wuhan Institute of Virology. The four-page report by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) said the U.S. intelligence community still could not rule out the possibility that the virus came from a laboratory, however, and had not been able to discover the origins of the pandemic (Whitcomb, 2023). According to the US CDC Research and Development Survey, vaccine hesitancy among U.S. adults increased from 40.7% in 2021 to over 44% in 2022 (Nguyen *et al.*, 2024). During the 2020 election, political affiliation was associated with lower COVID-19 vaccination rates, and vaccine misinformation was pervasive. Racial prejudice and racist structural barriers, which are all too common in the U.S., were also associated with low vaccination rates. It is obvious that the U.S. public health promotion of the COVID-19 vaccine was insufficient (The Lancet, 2023). The U.S. was vulnerable due to its unequal and inconsistent population health, high prevalence of non-communicable diseases, and lack of universal health coverage. During the period of March-April 2020, the benchmark U.S. interest rate was in a range of 0 to 0.25%, down from a range of 1 to 1.25%, and 1.8 to 2 trillion dollars were circulating outside the U.S., and by 2Q of 2022, \$4.7 trillion was in the hands of U.S. people, up from \$1 trillion in cash currency back in 4Q of 2019, as \$1.5 trillion was directly pushed in the form of stimulus checks and supplementary unemployment benefits during 2020–2021, which created massive inflation (Long, 2020; Fox, 2022).

According to the Small Arms Survey (SAS), there are 120 guns for every 100 Americans. No other country has more civilian guns than the United States. The United States has a long and enduring relationship with firearms. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the rate of firearm homicide in the United States increased by nearly 35% (Fox *et al.*, 2023; Zwald *et al.*, 2023). While the U.S. government has certain legal frameworks, such as the Arms Export Control Act and the Foreign Assistance Act, that are intended to guide arms sales and prevent the use of weapons to violate human rights, critics argue that these regulations are not always enforced effectively. It often prioritizes its geopolitical interests and strategic alliances with certain countries over human rights concerns. Human rights have frequently been invoked selectively or to achieve a short-term diplomatic goal by the US government (Human Rights Watch News, 2020). Providing military aid or selling weapons to certain countries can be seen as a way to exert influence and maintain leverage over them.

CHAPTER 3

Europe: Confronting Biggest Challenges for a Better Future

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Abstract: Europe's strength stems from its low levels of internal conflict and political instability, as well as its high socioeconomic development, which has been bolstered by long-standing efforts to establish peaceful societies at home. It has had periods of relative peace since World War II, but conflicts and their consequences continue to affect the region. The Eurasia region experienced the greatest regional deterioration in peacefulness. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on Europe and the world. The region experienced a significant number of cases and deaths, and measures, such as lockdowns and travel restrictions, had severe economic consequences. Many businesses, particularly those in the tourism, hospitality, and retail sectors, faced closures and financial hardships. Unemployment rates rose, and governments had to allocate substantial resources to support their citizens and economies through stimulus packages and other measures. The climate crisis is another major challenge that Europe, like the rest of the world, is grappling with. The region has experienced extreme weather events, such as heatwaves, floods, and storms, which have impacted both health and the economy. Nonetheless, the general objective across Europe is to navigate the ongoing crises and foster economic growth through a combination of supportive policies, investments in key sectors, and a focus on sustainable and resilient development.

Keywords: Chronic diseases, Drug shortages, Electronic vehicles, Food inflation, Lockdown, Recession, Renewable energy, Unemployment, Vaccine skepticism.

INTRODUCTION

The European Union has the world's third-largest economy and accounts for one-sixth of global trade (Fig. 1). The GDPs of Germany (\$4 trillion), France (\$2.7 trillion), and Italy (\$1.9 trillion) combined account for more than half of the EU's total economic output of \$16 trillion. These three countries are also the most populous in the EU, accounting for two-thirds of the EU's total population, along with Spain and Poland. The European Union generates roughly three-fourths of

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Europe's GDP. The per capita GDP of Europe today is 30% below that of the United States, as of 2022 (Rao, 2023; Smit *et al.*, 2022).



Fig. (1). A map of Europe, created using MapChart. It is essential to acknowledge that Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan are transcontinental nations, navigating evolving geopolitical landscapes. The continent of Europe traditionally concludes at the Bosphorus Strait in Turkey and extends to the border with Georgia in the Caucasus Mountain range. Consequently, Armenia is geographically situated within the continent of Asia, as per the World Atlas.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe, significant findings emerged across various sectors. Starting in 2022, COVID-19 evolved rapidly amidst relaxed movement restrictions, posing challenges to vaccine adaptation efforts. By mid-October 2022, WHO and the ECDC warnings highlighted Europe's impending COVID-19 resurgence, exacerbated by vaccine hesitancy and fatigue affecting booster uptake. Concurrently, countries like France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the UK reported increased cases of invasive Group A streptococcal disease among young children since September (Mishra *et al.*, 2022; World News, 2022; WHO News, 2022). Following widespread COVID-19 immunization in 2021, notable disparities in vaccine skepticism emerged across Europe, with Eastern European nations showing high hesitancy rates (Toshkov, 2023). Between

December 2020 and March 2023, COVID-19 vaccines saved approximately 1.4 million lives in the region by March 2023, reducing deaths by 57%, with early boosters preventing 700,000 deaths. Challenges persisted into 2024 with a surge in influenza hospitalizations (58%) and ICU admissions (21%), and quadrupled influenza cases from November to December 2023 (WHO Europe News Statement, 2024). The launch of the Pan-European Network for Disease Control in April 2024 aimed to enhance regional preparedness and unify disease management under a One Health approach (WHO Media Release, 2024). The pandemic also saw a rise in disinformation campaigns, particularly on vaccine safety and the Russia-Ukraine conflict, disseminated mainly through social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, aiming to provoke emotional responses and polarize audiences (Sánchez del Vas & Tuñón Navarro, 2024). Migration patterns were disrupted, impacting labor, student mobility, and refugee resettlement, with a 40% reduction in resettlement from 2019 to 2020, exacerbated by stringent border policies and economic disruptions. Irregular migration routes became more dangerous, with Mediterranean deaths increasing by 41% in 2021 (Lindsay, 2024). Meanwhile, Europe's industrial sector, employing over 40 million people in the EU and 16 million in China, faced challenges but maintained resilience, particularly benefiting from reduced LNG competition from Asia during the winter of 2022–2023 (Benny, 2023). Financially, Europe experienced initial fragmentation and subsequent re-integration efforts following the PEPP announcement, with money markets leading recovery by mid-2020, followed by stabilization in sovereign and corporate bond markets amid ongoing policy uncertainties (Borgioli *et al.*, 2024).

In 2023, the Ukraine war exerted significant economic pressures globally, compounded by rising interest rates, soaring prices, and COVID-19 disruptions in China, which curtailed production. The IMF forecasted recessions affecting half of the European Union and one-third of the world. Despite strong US-EU unity on Ukraine, the EU navigated unprecedented policy shifts amidst the conflict, potentially altering sanctions, negotiation stances, and financial aid for Ukraine. Financial aid disbursements, initially delayed in 2022, resumed on schedule in 2023 (Davies, 2023; Archick, 2023). The EU pledged \$54.58 billion in aid for Ukraine from 2024–2027, aimed at short-term financing and reconstruction post-war (Baczynska, 2023). The EU's shared budget for 2021–2027, depleted by COVID-19 and the Ukraine conflict, necessitated a 50 billion-euro review. Studies provide a comprehensive look into how the Russia-Ukraine conflict has profoundly affected Europe, spanning currency stability amid geopolitical volatility and the doubling of debt servicing costs due to high inflation and interest rates. Akarsu and Gharehgozli (2023) reveal currency fluctuations impacting the Polish Zloty, Hungarian Forint, and Swedish Krone, contrasting with stability in the Czech Koruna and Romanian Leu using extensive time series

Section 2 (Countries Under International Sanctions)

CHAPTER 4

Iran: Various Challenges Amid Multiple Crises**Ali Mohammad Mosadeghrad^{1,*}**¹ *Department of Health Management and Economics, School of Public Health, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran*

Abstract: Iran navigates a multifaceted socioeconomic crisis marked by the compounding effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic sanctions, involvement in the Ukraine and Syria wars, and escalating climate and environmental challenges. The prolonged sanctions, intensified by the 2018 reinstatement, led to the highest inflation and lowest growth by 2019, straining healthcare infrastructure and causing drug shortages crucial during the pandemic. The economic strain deepened during COVID-19, increasing unemployment and poverty rates, doubling extreme poverty, and diminishing the average per capita calorie intake. Iran's strategic alignment with Russia in the Ukraine war, providing support and leveraging the crisis for geopolitical gains, further complicates its economic outlook. Simultaneously, its involvement in the Syrian conflict compounds regional dynamics, involving substantial financial investments and military support. Climate change exacerbates existing vulnerabilities, impacting agriculture, public health, tourism, and gender dynamics, with rising temperatures, air pollution, and climate-sensitive diseases posing significant threats. Iranian women face heightened vulnerability due to gender disparities during natural disasters and climate-induced crises, necessitating gender-inclusive adaptation strategies. Environmental concerns, exemplified by protests around Lake Orumiyeh and the 2009 Green Movement, reflect widespread discontent with environmental degradation, water mismanagement, and government actions.

Keywords: Antiregime protests, Child labor, Chronic diseases, Economic mismanagement, Food insecurity, GHG emissions, International sanctions, Poverty, Refugee crisis, Unemployment, Vaccine hesitancy, Women's rights.

INTRODUCTION

The Islamic Republic of Iran is a country in West Asia that borders the Caspian Sea and Turkmenistan to the north, Azerbaijan and Armenia to the northwest, Afghanistan and Pakistan to the east, Iraq and Turkey to the west, and the Persian

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Gulf and the Gulf of Oman to the south (Fig. 1). Iran has one of the oldest civilizations in the world, dating back to the fourth millennium BC. Iran is the 17th largest country and the 17th most populous country in the world with a population of about 89 million and an area of about 1.65 million square kilometers.



Fig. (1). Map of Iran (generated with MapChart).

Iran faced exacerbated challenges due to prolonged sanctions and the 2018 reinstatement, leading to the highest inflation and lowest growth by 2019. Economic strain impeded healthcare infrastructure, causing drug shortages critical for COVID-19, affecting chronic disease patients. Sanctions diverted resources, impacting maternal and child health, while shortages of healthcare professionals jeopardized pandemic control. Misinformation complicated responses, and sanctions hindered scientific research, emphasizing the long-term impacts on an aging population. Relief is essential for effective pandemic and healthcare management in Iran (Abdoli, 2020). The COVID-19 crisis further strained the economy, increasing unemployment and reducing incomes, exacerbating food

insecurity (Bagher Ghalibaf *et al.*, 2022). Pourshahabi (2023) conducted a comparative analysis of Iran's COVID-19 management with G7 countries, revealing influential indicators through statistical analyses, including MANOVA and Tukey's post hoc test. Cultural clusters played a role, with Iran's response ranking seventh, suggesting that supporting measures were more effective than strict lockdowns and recommending tailored crisis responses based on national culture for effective pandemic management. Poverty in Iran had doubled, with one-third of the population living in extreme poverty, as reported by the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare. The minimum monthly income needed for a family of four to stay above the poverty line increased by 50% within a year, reaching approximately \$250 for the entire country. Contributing factors include a 50% rise in inflation, a 50% drop in the national currency, loss of one million jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, and a significant decrease in the average per capita calorie intake from 2,700 kcal in 2011 to below 2,200 kcal in 2021 (Iran International Newsroom, 2023a).

Iran, despite being the world's fifth most resource-rich country with vast oil and gas reserves, faces crippling poverty due to a combination of self-inflicted wounds and external pressures. Economic mismanagement, sanctions, and isolationist policies have contributed to the country's economic downfall, resulting in hyperinflation and a staggering 53.4% official inflation rate. The government's focus on ideological pursuits, such as nuclear ambitions and regional proxy conflicts, has diverted resources from addressing the pressing needs of the population, leading to a housing crisis and a lack of investment in critical sectors. The path to recovery necessitates a shift in governance priorities, embracing international collaboration and empowering the nation's diverse economic sectors (Ziabari, 2023).

The extensive U.S. economic sanctions on Iran, particularly post-Islamic Revolution, have had profound impacts on the nation's economy, focusing on energy and finance, causing significant trade and financing challenges. Despite temporary relief from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015, the 2018 U.S. withdrawal resulted in substantial economic repercussions, including Iranian rial devaluation, record inflation, and a 60% decline in crude oil production. In the Ukraine war, Iran strategically supports Russia by providing advanced drones, deepening its alignment with Moscow, and causing diplomatic tensions with Europe. Simultaneously, Iran takes advantage of the Ukraine crisis by leveraging it to offset Russia's energy supplies to the West, enhancing its geopolitical position in the Middle East. In the Syrian conflict, Iran's involvement aims to prevent the collapse of the Syrian government, safeguard strategic interests, and establish lasting influence in the region. Amid the Ukraine crisis, collaboration between Russia, Iran, and Syria intensifies, involving substantial

CHAPTER 5

Sanctions and Common Global Crises: The Socioeconomic Challenges of Russia

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Abstract: Russia, the world's largest country by land area, boasts a rich history as a key supplier of commodities, particularly energy and food. The conflict in Ukraine has a significant impact on the world's supply chain, and unprecedented Western sanctions have severely harmed the Russian economy because the West is unwilling to engage a nuclear adversary in open combat. The international payments system SWIFT has been partially restricted in access, the assets of the Russian central bank have been frozen, wealthy Russians and some state-owned banks have been singled out, and Germany has suspended its project to build a gas pipeline through Russia (the Nord Stream 2 Baltic Sea gas pipeline project). The European Union (EU), the US, the UK, and Canada have frozen assets of Russia's central bank in their countries. Despite its rich medical history and universal healthcare coverage, Russia confronts significant obstacles, including an aging population, high mortality rates, and a prevalence of non-communicable diseases. The pharmaceutical industry in Russia also grapples with issues related to drug dependency on imported medications and affordability concerns. Moreover, broader socio-economic and geopolitical factors, such as the Ukraine conflict, international sanctions, and the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbate these challenges.

Keywords: Access to medicines, Corruption, Demographic crisis, Drug shortage, Economic challenges, Energy trade, Healthcare coverage, Healthcare workforce shortages, Oil & gas export, Non-communicable diseases, War in Ukraine.

INTRODUCTION

Russia is the world's largest country, encompassing one-eighth of Earth's habitable landmass, and is home to 193 ethnic groups who speak over 270 languages and dialects (Fig. 1). It is the world's largest exporter of wheat (18% of total international export) and fertilizer (30% of ammonia, 14% of urea, and 10% of processed phosphate to the global market), the second-largest exporter of crude, sunflower oil (23% of the world's supply), and producer of natural gas; the

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fourth largest exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG); the 10th largest economy in terms of total export; the 11th largest economy in the world in terms of GDP; and the 21st economy in terms of total imports (in 2021) (Cooban, 2023; Europa Publications, 2022; Heaney & McIntyre, 2023; Latypova, 2023; OEC, 2023; OECD, FAO, 2022). Russia has a long history of internal and external conflicts, as well as major events in recent decades, such as economic crises, disputed elections, and global shocks (Tandon, 2022).



Fig. (1). The Russian Federation (Vector map/Canva Illustrator).

Russia, like other nations, endeavored to strike a balance between mitigating the spread of COVID-19 and addressing the detrimental economic impacts of restrictions. The Russian president, for instance, called for a sharp increase in the production of test systems for accurate diagnostics and reinforced efforts to develop a vaccine. The country relied heavily on domestic resources in its fight against the virus, demonstrating a strong emphasis on self-sufficiency amid the global crisis.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine triggered large-scale humanitarian, migration, and refugee crises, but it also increased risks to the global economy and health, which are already dealing with the COVID pandemic and climate crisis. As a result, the United States, Europe, and many other Western countries (including Canada and Australia) have imposed increasingly broad sanctions on individuals, banks, corporations, and large state-owned enterprises, as well as exports. Russia is now subject to over 13,000 restrictions. Despite the fact that Russia had a

system of state capitalism in place prior to the war, its economic strategy focused mainly on the advancement of technology, broadening exports away from the country's reliance on fossil fuels, and relatively free capital movements. Capital controls, labelling countries as friendly or hostile, cryptocurrencies and Yuan payments, and the militarization of the budget are now replacing those elements (Prokopenko, 2023). The US, EU, UK, and other countries are being targeted by over a thousand Russian companies and individuals. And more than a thousand foreign businesses, including McDonald's, PepsiCo, H&M, and Adidas, have stopped doing business in Russia. Russia hits back at Western sanctions with export bans, prohibiting the export of more than 200 Western goods, including telecommunications, medical, vehicle, agricultural, electrical, and timber products. About 50 countries will be affected, including the US and the EU. Also, it has stopped paying interest to foreign holders of government bonds and has prohibited Russian companies from paying their overseas shareholders (Bloomberg News, 2022; Business correspondent, 2022; Chief Executive Leadership Institute, 2023). Sanctions might not be enough to defeat Russia on their own, but they have targeted high-tech components, including those used by the military, and aim to stunt Russia's future development. Sanctions will exacerbate Russia's outlook's already-existing fault lines of persistent underinvestment, weak productivity growth, and labour shortages.

As of 2024, Russia faced significant environmental impacts, including flooding, heat waves, droughts, and wildfires, which affected communities, agriculture, forestry, and water resources (DeStazio *et al.*, 2024). Russia, the world's fourth-largest emitter, has unambitious climate targets, largely due to the lack of progress under Putin's 24-year rule, marked by no significant move away from fossil fuels. Early in his tenure, Putin joked that 2-3°C of warming might benefit Russia, reducing the need for fur coats. In 2015, he committed to cutting emissions by 25-30% below 1990 levels by 2030, marginally raising this to at least 30% in 2020. Despite a pledge to reach net zero by 2060, these targets were modest, given emissions had already dropped 25% by the late 1990s (Conkling, 2024). The 2022 Ukraine invasion further deprioritized climate action, with the environmental budget reduced amid rising military expenditures and sanctions. Russia's increased fossil fuel production and rollback of environmental regulations have shifted its climate agenda, focusing more on economic priorities. Emissions are 30% below 1990 levels, but targets are deemed "highly insufficient" by the Climate Action Tracker. The reliance on imported technology for emissions reduction, with the oil sector at 55%, coal at 45%, and power at 31%, complicates climate initiatives amid strained Western relations (Pudovkin, 2023). The climate cost of the first two years of Russia's war on Ukraine was greater than the annual greenhouse gas emissions of 175 countries, worsening the global climate crisis (Lakhani, 2024). By June 2024, Russia's regions experienced diverse climate

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